Waste sector rejects Florenz proposal to reduce cross-border transport of household waste

‘Transporting waste is a vehicle for CO₂ reduction’

In February 2009 the European Parliament will vote on the Florenz report, named after the report’s rapporteur, the German MEP Karl-Heinz Florenz. The European waste industry fully endorses the need for an adequate response to climate change and is keen to make its own contribution. However, a phrase in Article 136 misses the point entirely. The proposal to minimise cross-border transport of mixed household waste does nothing to protect the climate. On the contrary, it hampers materials recycling and energy recovery from waste, both major sources of CO₂ reduction.

The Florenz report by the Temporary Committee on Climate Change envisages an integrated approach to tackling climate change and contains hundreds of recommendations for tackling global warming. The main goal is to prevent the average global temperature rising by more than 2°Celsius. Among the committee’s recommendations for achieving this are an 80 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050 and the establishment of climate funds. Not all the proposed measures are on the right track, though, as can be seen in the section of the report that deals with waste. Adopting Article 136, which links waste transport to greenhouse gases, would be a shot in the foot for European climate policy. To reduce waste transport the article proposes bringing cross-border transport of mixed household waste down to the minimum. In other words, avoid exports of household residual waste. According to Diederik Gijsbers, a board member of Van Gansewinkel Group, the committee’s proposal will achieve the opposite. ‘This measure will actually raise CO₂ emissions. From a climate point of view it makes more sense to encourage cross-border transport. Interregional cooperation encourages eco-efficiency. Sometimes waste can be processed closer by and in a more climate-friendly way just over the border rather than in the same member state. Take the border region of Twente in the Netherlands, for example. It is more efficient to process German waste from the border town of Gronau in the Netherlands than to haul it all the way to Hamburg or Cologne. The same goes for household waste from Limburg in the south of the Netherlands, which can easily be incinerated in the nearby German city of Aachen. In such situations Article 136 would result in transporting waste over longer distances.’ Adriaan Visser,

BY ADDO VAN DER EIJK

The waste sector calls on MEPs to hold a separate vote on deleting the wording ‘cross-border’ from Article 136
chair of the executive board of SITA Northern Europe Waste Services, agrees with Gijsbers. He believes that closing borders is an outmoded remedy. ‘Waste management is part of a larger value chain consisting of raw materials extraction, production, packaging and distribution, right up to the waste and recycling phase. We give waste a second life as raw materials and as fuel, and in doing so we close the value loop. Not only do we reduce costs to our clients, but we also make significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The waste sector is highly relevant to the climate discussion.’

Visser claims that Article 136 is contrary to the EU principle of free movement of goods and services. ‘Goods are sent all around the world. So, from the whole supply chain, why just focus on waste? You don’t hear anyone arguing for a reduction in the transport of oranges or televisions.’ Like goods transport, the waste sector is international in scope and waste companies like SITA work in many European countries. ‘Europe should not think in terms of national boundaries any more, but in terms of logistical circles around the production of waste,’ says Visser.

**GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY**

What Visser misses in the Florenz report is recognition of the valuable part played by the European waste sector in recycling and reusing waste. He believes the contribution made by the sector to climate policy is underestimated. ‘Waste management is a golden opportunity in Europe’s efforts to achieve its ambitious targets for 2020 and 2050. Recycling and waste-to-energy incineration save us large quantities of greenhouse gas emissions. Transporting waste is a vehicle for CO₂ reduction. The persistent impression that waste transport is by definition bad does not hold up. In the CO₂ balance for the whole chain, the CO₂ emissions from transport are minor compared with the emissions avoided by recycling. To make environmental gains it pays to recycle waste or incinerate it with energy recovery.’

Gijsbers sees promise in the proposal by MEP Markus Pieper, who submitted amendment 292. ‘Pieper proposes first carrying out a study into the relation between waste logistics and CO₂ production. Logistics are an indispensable part of high-performance waste processing and recycling. A study can help to improve our understanding of the relation between transport, primary and secondary waste or materials and CO₂ emissions.’

**LEGAL QUESTIONS**

Gijsbers maintains that the provision in Article 136 runs counter to European legislation. ‘The recently revised Waste Framework Directive seeks to promote efficient cooperation between member states, partly to avoid the need for

**WASTE SECTOR IN THE EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME**

Besides Article 136 in the Florenz report, the European waste sector is also concerned about Article 141, which calls for including the waste sector in the emissions trading scheme (ETS). Diederik Gijsbers of Van Gansewinkel Group has this to say: ‘The emissions trading scheme is not the right instrument to urge the waste sector to reduce CO₂ emissions. It would punish waste companies for emitting CO₂, but not reward them for the CO₂ reductions they make. Although certain activities do emit CO₂, in the final analysis they deliver far more in CO₂ reductions. Such innovations and investments are discouraged by the emissions trading scheme. We would like to see the amendment to Article 141 by Rebecca Harms MEP (amendment 298) adopted. She proposes scrapping the article.’
smaller member states like Cyprus, Malta and Luxembourg to build a costly and advanced waste processing infrastructure.‘ Visser adds: ‘It contravenes the Waste Shipment Regulation (WSR) that recently came into force. The Waste Framework Directive recognises that efficient incinerators have the status of recovery operations and that it can be environmentally beneficial to transport waste across borders to recover energy in efficient waste incinerators. Article 136 looks very like a one-sided basis for refusing the cross-border transport of waste.’

Visser therefore predicts that legal issues like Article 136 will be translated into policy. He points out that the cross-border transport of mixed household waste is already subject to strict regulations. ‘The WSR has a monitoring mechanism for assessing the permissible passage of waste across borders. The WSR also contains a provision under which member states can refuse mixed household waste, whatever its destination. And then there is the proximity principle: waste should be disposed of as close as possible to the point at which it is generated. Any further restriction on the cross-border transport of waste does not seem desirable to me. Reducing CO₂ emissions through recycling is simply too important.’

Visser emphasises that waste companies are currently looking closely at how to improve their logistics processes. SITA led the way in the Netherlands and Flanders, fitting its entire vehicle fleet with advanced on-board computers that maintain constant satellite contact with the central planning department to plot the optimal route. Other major players are already following suit. Visser: ‘The sector is highly

**ADRIAAN VISSEER [SITA]:**
‘Europe should no longer think in terms of national boundaries, but of logistical circles around the production of waste.’

**WASTE SHIPMENTS**
THINK IN TERMS OF LOGISTICAL CIRCLES

**REDUCING COSTS**
The fear that household waste will be shipped all over Europe to obtain CO₂ gains is unfounded, claims Visser. ‘Waste companies want to keep distances as short as possible. Transport is expensive and to keep costs down they naturally choose the closest appropriate facility. In this case market forces and CO₂ reduction go hand in hand – on the condition that there is a level playing field with high environmental standards and workable procedures in the European member states.’
LOGISTICS AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Policy must focus on the whole waste management chain, not on distance travelled.
- CO₂ emissions from waste transport are nothing like the size of avoided CO₂ emissions through waste recycling and energy from waste.
- Optimal waste management is an important opportunity for European CO₂ reduction.
- Interregional cooperation – transporting waste to a processing facility just over the border – is often more efficient and better for the environment than hauling it long distances in your own country. Think in terms of logistical circles.
- Open borders and a European market are eco-efficient; they optimise materials recycling and the generation of energy from waste.
- Recycling saves primary raw materials; waste is given a second life as a raw material or product.
- Waste transport is already efficient, with an optimal load, low-energy vehicles and clean fuels.

innovative when it comes to managing carbon emissions throughout the whole supply chain. For example, we have developed a CO₂ audit that reveals how companies can contribute to reducing CO₂ emissions by adopting sustainable waste management.’

Rather than closing the borders, Visser thinks it is better to transport the acquired knowledge and experience to the new member states, where most waste is still landfilled. ‘A study by research consultants Prognos shows that the CO₂ reduction potential in these countries is considerable. The Florenz report ignores this opportunity. Europe must focus on high – but realistic – quality standards, a well balanced system of controls and information exchange between authorities. The Florenz proposal forces Europe to wait for the worst pupil in the class and risk losing both time and greenhouse gas reductions.’

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RECOMMENDATION OF FEAD – THE EUROPEAN WASTE ASSOCIATION

| Waste Transport | Article 136 | Oppose original AM 293 by Mr. Florenz  
| Emission Trading System | Article 141 | Support original AM 298 by Ms. Harms (deletion of Article 141) |

For more information about climate protection see presentations of FEAD Annual Conference 2008 on the website www.fead.be